

Death of Boy, 9, at Md. Wave Pool Is Ruled Drowning: Medical Examiner ...

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The Maryland Medical Examiner concluded yesterday that 9-year-old Christie Davis died of drowning Wednesday at the Wild World wave pool in Largo and that there was no sign the boy had a seizure. A lifeguard at the pool had reported that it looked as if the child had a seizure.

"It was an accidental drowning and we feel it was very tragic," said Wild World spokeswoman Paula Yudelevit. "We have the highest safety standards there are . . . There are inherent risks in a public place and people need to be aware of those risks and take responsibility."

Police said witnesses told them that Chris-

tie and a young cousin had been in the pool for two hours at 5:30 p.m. when a wave pushed Christie off the raft.

But Wild World's Yudelevit said the wave machine was not on at the time of the accident, that lifeguards had turned it off moments earlier while they helped a woman who was suffering from apparent exhaustion. They then noticed Christie thrashing in the water, appearing to have a seizure, Yudelevit said she was told by a lifeguard. The pool was closed Wednesday for an hour after the incident.

Police ruled the incident an accidental drowning.

Daniel Dudley, Maryland supervisor of amusement rides for the Department of Li-

censing and Regulations, said yesterday he is investigating the cause of the drowning.

Christie, who is from Anderson, S.C., was visiting his aunt, Isabella Prather, in the District.

Prather said Christie was a healthy boy and had been taught how to swim by his cousin, Patricia Cowan, 37, who took him to the Wild World pool Wednesday. Prather said Cowan told her the waves were on when Christie drowned.

"He had been begging me all week to let him go swimming," Prather said. "He was so happy he could go."

The pool, which has been promoted in
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Medical Examiner Finds Boy's Death At Wave Pool Was Result of Drowning

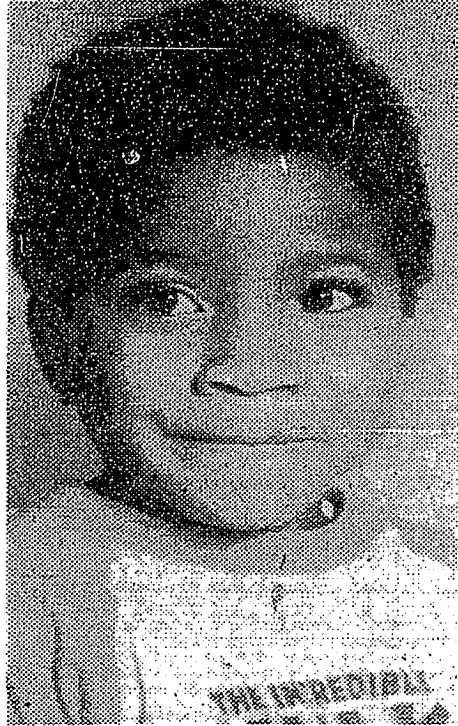
WAVES, From B1

television commercials, holds more than 1 million gallons of water that is propelled by eight 60-horsepower turbine engines sending four-foot waves pulsating through the one-acre pool. The depth ranges from zero to eight feet. Christie drowned in about four feet of water in the middle of the pool.

Wild World, a 2-year-old amusement park on Central Avenue in Largo, opened Wild Wave, as the pool is called, on May 30 at a cost of \$2 million. It is the largest of 230 wave pools worldwide, including 41 in the United States, according to its manufacturer, WaveTek of Ashland, Ohio.

Since the first wave pool opened in 1970 at a public park in Decatur, Ala., it is estimated that 16.8 million people have enjoyed them, WaveTek sales manager Alan Huess said. The only other death reported occurring in a wave pool was last summer at Action Park in Vernon, N.J., Huess said. A 13-year-old boy swallowed water and drowned, Action Park spokeswoman Julie Mullvihill said yesterday. She said that since then an underwater camera has been installed that is watched when the pool is crowded.

"The number of accidents is less



CHRISTIE DAVIS

... no sign of seizure found

in wave pools than in regular pools because they are better supervised," Huess said.

Wild World has 12 lifeguards on duty, 10 standing on lifeguard chairs while two walk around the pool. Those on the chairs have a button, which they immediately press to turn off the

waves if someone needs help. There is an emergency medical technician on duty at all times and safety rules are read over a loudspeaker every hour, according to Yudelevit.

There is no minimum age and no swimming test for those who want to go in the pool, said operations manager Michael Gates.

Though the pool has a capacity for 2,000 swimmers, there were about 400 Wednesday afternoon when Christie drowned, Yudelevit said. The waves were operating in cycles, 12 minutes on and 8 minutes off so swimmers could rest.

Until last week, Yudelevit said that a bell would ring before the waves were started. Because the bell caused youngsters to run for the pool, knocking over little children, Wild World officials decided to discontinue the warning bell.

Yesterday another crowd of about 400 was splashing in the pool though some were a little nervous.

Lena Moore of Capitol Heights took her 12-year-old son Morris to the pool yesterday. "I promised my son I would bring him here but when I heard the news I was ready to back out. It made me nervous when he disappeared under the waves a minute ago. But he knows what happened and he's not worried."